IN THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT FOR THE EASTERN DISTRICT OF PENNSYLVANIA

JANELLE BROFMAN :

36 Cloister Road Levittown, PA 19057

CIVIL ACTION

Plaintiff,

DOCKET NO.:

v. :

UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA

HEALTH SYSTEM d/b/a THE TRUSTEES:

OF THE UNIVERSITY OF

PENNSYLVANIA 800 Spruce Street

Philadelphia, PA 19107

Defendant.

JURY TRIAL DEMANDED

COMPLAINT

Plaintiff, Janelle Brofman (hereinafter referred to as "Plaintiff"), by and through her undersigned counsel, hereby avers as follows:

INTRODUCTION

1. Plaintiff initiates the instant action to redress violations by Defendant University of Pennsylvania d/b/a The Trustees of the University of Pennsylvania (hereinafter referred to as "Defendant") of the Family and Medical Leave Act ("FMLA" - 29 U.S.C. §§ 2601, et. seq.), the Americans with Disabilities Act ("ADA"), the Pennsylvania Human Relations Act ("PHRA"), and the Philadelphia Fair Practices Ordinance. Plaintiff asserts, *inter alia*, that her employment was unlawfully terminated by Defendant. As a direct consequence of Defendant's unlawful actions, Plaintiff seeks damages as set forth herein.

¹ Plaintiff's claims under the PHRA and the PFPO are referenced herein for notice purposes. She is required to wait 1 full year before initiating a lawsuit from date of dual-filing with the EEOC. Plaintiff must however file her lawsuit in advance of same because of the date of issuance of her federal right-to-sue-letter under the ADA. Plaintiff's PHRA and PFPO claims however will mirror identically her federal claims under the ADA.

JURISDICTION AND VENUE

- 2. This action is initiated pursuant to a federal law. The United States District Court for the Eastern District of Pennsylvania has original subject matter jurisdiction over this action pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 1331 because the claims herein arise under a law of the United States.
- 3. This Court may properly maintain personal jurisdiction over Defendant because its contacts with this state and this judicial district are sufficient for the exercise of jurisdiction in order to comply with traditional notions of fair play and substantial justice, satisfying the standard set forth by the United States Supreme Court in <u>International Shoe Co. v. Washington</u>, 326 U.S. 310 (1945) and its progeny.
- 4. Venue is properly laid in this District pursuant to 28 U.S.C. §§ 1391(b)(1) and (b)(2), because Defendant resides in and/or conducts business in this judicial district and because a substantial part of the acts and/or omissions giving rise to the claims set forth herein occurred in this judicial district.
- 5. Plaintiff filed a Charge of discrimination and retaliation with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission ("EEOC") and also dual-filed said charge with the Pennsylvania Human Relations Commission ("PHRC"). Plaintiff has properly exhausted her administrative proceedings before initiating this action by timely filing and dual-filing her Charge with the EEOC, and by filing the instant lawsuit within 90 days of receiving a right-to-sue letter from the EEOC.

PARTIES

- 6. The foregoing paragraphs are incorporated herein in their entirety as if set forth in full.
 - 7. Plaintiff is an adult individual, with an address as set forth in the caption.

- 8. Defendant is a private university which operates a University Laboratory Animal Resources ("ULAR") department.
- 9. At all times relevant herein, Defendant acted by and through its agents, servants and employees, each of whom acted at all times relevant herein in the course and scope of their employment with and for Defendant.

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

- 10. The foregoing paragraphs are incorporated here in their entirety as if set forth in full.
- 11. Plaintiff suffers from serious medical conditions including Multiple Sclerosis ("MS") and related complications which cause her pain, fatigue, impaired coordination, vertigo, weakness, bladder complications and other symptoms.
- 12. Plaintiff's aforementioned disability, at times, substantially limits her ability to perform daily life functions such as lifting, dressing herself, holding objects, walking, and standing.
- 13. On or about June 12, 2017, Defendant hired Plaintiff to work in ULAR as a Lab Animal Assistant Technician through her unlawful termination on or about February 13, 2023, as discussed herein.
- 14. ULAR is responsible for the procurement, care, and use of all university-owned animals used for teaching, research, and testing in accordance with state or federal regulations. Species of laboratory animals include rodents, dogs, cats, rabbits, pigs, sheep, nonhuman primates, birds, shrews, and aquatic species (although Plaintiff was only assigned to select species).
- 15. Plaintiff provided care, management, and oversight for the health, welfare and safety of specific animals within ULAR.

- 16. Upon hire, Defendant assigned Plaintiff to the Hill Pavilion (the "Hill Building") and in or about February of 2022, transferred to Defendant's Carolyn Lynch Laboratory (the "Lynch Building").
- 17. Defendant's Multi-Unit Research Facility Manager was Darien Davenport ("Davenport") became Plaintiff's direct supervisor for the first time when she transferred to the Lynch Building.
- 18. While Plaintiff has suffered from MS related complications for years, she was formally diagnosed in or about mid-2022, as her condition had worsened significantly to the point that she required reasonable accommodations.
- 19. For example, while at work Plaintiff performed her job well, but walked a bit slower with a very noticeable limp at times, sometimes asked for help with a task, and other times requested short and intermittent breaks.
- 20. As a result, Plaintiff openly discussed her need for these aforesaid reasonable accommodations with Davenport and sought intermittent leave under the FMLA as she, at times, needed to miss work infrequently (such as coming in late at times or missing a day here or there), needed breaks while working, assistance with lifting, or the ability to complete a task the following day.
- 21. Up until this point, Plaintiff had been an exemplary employee with no disciplinary or performance-based concerns, but now required infrequent accommodations (or use of FMLA leave) to help her treat occasional flare-ups of her MS.
- 22. Davenport showed clear frustration and disdain for Plaintiff's occasional lateness even though same should have been protected under the FMLA.²

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² See e.g. Murphy v. Brown, 2010 WL 1292704 (N.D. Ill. 2010)(denying summary judgment on plaintiff's interference claim because the FMLA is intended to cover small increments of leave including lateness of an

- 23. Plaintiff's arms and hands would seize and/or cramp so severely that Plaintiff was unable to even get dressed some mornings and Plaintiff would inform Davenport of her need to come in late.
- 24. Despite explicitly telling Davenport that she needed to be late, at times, due to her aforementioned disability, Davenport would openly admonish Plaintiff, complain that Defendant was short-staffed and that he could not run the facility if she came in late, even if it was for health reasons.
- 25. It was not just Davenport that was intolerant of Plaintiff's health, a co-worker, Rhonda Stevens ("Stevens") was also very intolerant. Stevens was continually abusive and combative with Plaintiff because she had a negative perception of Plaintiff's health impacting her job functions.
- 26. On several occasions, Plaintiff complained to Davenport and shared that she felt there was open and abject hostility towards her from both him and Stevens because of their views of her health, or requests for reasonable accommodations.
- 27. Plaintiff even offered to transfer back to her prior location, or was willing to focus in research areas that Stevens didn't work within, just to get away from the constant abuse.
- 28. However, Davenport only cared about having Plaintiff for staffing needs, and did nothing to mitigate any of Plaintiff's complaints or address her requests for accommodations.

employee, and there was a factual question as to whether the employer counted lateness that should have been considered FMLA leave); *Hite v. Vermeer Mfg. Co.*, 446 F.3d 858 (8th Cir.2006)(affirming jury verdict that employee was terminated in retaliation for exercising FMLA rights, including using intermittent FMLA leave to arrive 15 or 30 minutes late to work); *Agbejimi v. Advocate Health and Hospitals Corp.*, WL 2589129 (N.D. III. 2009)(summary judgment denied because lateness is specifically covered by the FMLA and there was evidence the employer considered possibly FMLA qualifying lateness in terminating plaintiff); *Bosse v. Baltimore County*, 692 F.Supp.2d 574 (D. Md. 2010)(denying summary judgment on plaintiff's interference claim wherein a jury could conclude lateness that was FMLA qualifying may have been considered in the decision to terminate plaintiff); *Mora v. Chem-Tronics, Inc.*, 16 F.Supp.2d 1192 (S.D. Cal. 1998)(denying summary judgment wherein employer considered potentially FMLA-qualifying lateness in adverse action and explaining that an employer's policy that fails to identify lateness may be covered by the FMLA is inadequate).

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- 29. During Plaintiff's last approximate 6 months of employment, she was subjected to tremendous hostility, nitpicked, and harassed on a continual basis.
- 30. For example, if Plaintiff came in late for a medical reason (which could be one (1) day per week on average), she was always and openly disciplined, admonished, and demeaned by Davenport; or if Plaintiff needed a break or help with a task, Stevens would question whether Plaintiff could even do her job and treated Plaintiff poorly as if she were too slow.
- 31. On or about February 13, 2023, Davenport ultimately terminated Plaintiff's employment, citing *inter alia*, Plaintiff's lateness along with other purported issues that arose *only after* her disclosure of her aforementioned disabilities and request for reasonable accommodations/FMLA leave.

COUNT I <u>Violation(s) of the Family and Medical Leave Act ("FMLA")</u> (Interference & Retaliation)

- 45. The foregoing paragraphs are incorporated herein in their entirety as if set forth in full.
- 46. Plaintiff worked for Defendant who were engaged in interstate commerce, and Plaintiff worked 1, 250 hours and more than 1 year making her eligible for FMLA leave.
- 47. Plaintiff's need for occasional FMLA-qualifying lateness for her serious medical condition was a direct consideration in Defendant's decision to terminate her employment.
- 48. Defendant's actions as aforesaid constitute interference and retaliation violations of the FMLA, and also a hostile work environment and unlawful dissuasion.

COUNT II

Violation(s) of the Americans with Disabilities Act ("ADA") ([1] Discrimination; [2] Hostile Work Environment; [3] Failure to Accommodate; and [4] Retaliation)

- 49. The foregoing paragraphs are incorporated herein in their entirety as if set forth in full.
- 50. Plaintiff suffers from qualifying disabilities, as that term is defined by the ADA, as amended, including Multiple Sclerosis and related medical conditions.
- 51. Plaintiff suffers from serious medical conditions including Multiple Sclerosis ("MS") and related complications which cause her pain, fatigue, impaired coordination, vertigo, weakness, bladder complications and other symptoms.
- 52. Plaintiff's aforementioned disability, at times, substantially limits her ability to perform daily life functions such as lifting, dressing herself, holding objects, walking, and standing.
- 53. Plaintiff put Defendant on notice of her need for a reasonable accommodation, in the form of time off of work/breaks to treat her aforementioned disability.
- 54. Defendant subjected Plaintiff' to severe and/or pervasive harassment on the basis of her actual/record or perceived disabilities.
- 55. Defendant failed to engage in any good faith interactive process, and instead terminated Plaintiff in direct relation to her disability status (including her actual/record or perceived disabilities) and in retaliation for pursuing reasonable medical accommodations/objecting to mistreatment based upon her disability status/need for accommodations.
- 56. Plaintiff avers that her actual/record or perceived disabilities were the motivating/determinative factor in Defendant's decision to terminate her.

- 57. Plaintiff avers that she was terminated because Defendant refused to engage in an interactive process with her and/or because they could not or would not grant her requests for reasonable accommodations.
- 58. Plaintiff avers that Defendant terminated her because of her complaints/opposition to unlawful employment practices and/or because she requested reasonable accommodations.

WHEREFORE, Plaintiff prays that this Court enter an Order providing that:

- A. Defendant is to compensate Plaintiff, reimburse Plaintiff and make Plaintiff whole for any and all pay and benefits Plaintiff would have received had it not been for Defendant's illegal actions, including but not limited to past lost earnings, future lost earnings (including but not limited to stemming from lost potential business due to a mandated leave and inability to stay in touch with clientele), salary, pay increases, bonuses, medical and other benefits, training, promotions, pension, and seniority. Plaintiff should be accorded those benefits illegally withheld from the date he first suffered retaliation/interference at the hands of Defendant until the date of verdict. Plaintiff seeks reinstatement or all available damages in the absence of reinstatement being permitted or deemed appropriate by the Court;
- B. Plaintiff is to be awarded punitive or liquidated damages, as permitted by applicable law;
- C. Plaintiff is to be accorded any and all other equitable and legal relief as the Court deems just, proper and appropriate (including but not limited to emotional distress damages under the ADA);

- D. Plaintiff is to be awarded the costs and expenses of this action and reasonable legal fees as provided by applicable federal and state law; and
- E. Plaintiff's claims are to receive trial by jury to the extent allowed by applicable law. Plaintiff has also endorsed this demand on the caption of this Complaint in accordance with Federal Rule of Civil Procedure 38(b).

Respectfully submitted,

KARPF, KARPF & CERUTTI, P.C.

By:

Ari R. Karpf, Esq. 8 Interplex Drive Suite 210 Feasterville-Trevose, PA 19053 (215) 639-0801 Attorneys for Plaintiff

Dated: June 18, 2024

IN THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT FOR THE EASTERN DISTRICT OF PENNSYLVANIA

CASE MANAGEMENT TRACK DESIGNATION FORM

CIVIL ACTION Janelle Brofman University of Pennsylvania Health System d/b/a The Trustees of the University of Pennsylvania In accordance with the Civil Justice Expense and Delay Reduction Plan of this court, counsel for plaintiff shall complete a Case Management Track Designation Form in all civil cases at the time of filing the complaint and serve a copy on all defendants. (See § 1:03 of the plan set forth on the reverse side of this form.) In the event that a defendant does not agree with the plaintiff regarding said designation, that defendant shall, with its first appearance, submit to the clerk of court and serve on the plaintiff and all other parties, a Case Management Track Designation Form specifying the track to which that defendant believes the case should be assigned. SELECT ONE OF THE FOLLOWING CASE MANAGEMENT TRACKS: (a) Habeas Corpus - Cases brought under 28 U.S.C. § 2241 through § 2255. ()(b) Social Security - Cases requesting review of a decision of the Secretary of Health and Human Services denying plaintiff Social Security Benefits. (c) Arbitration - Cases required to be designated for arbitration under Local Civil Rule 53.2. (d) Asbestos - Cases involving claims for personal injury or property damage from exposure to asbestos. () (e) Special Management - Cases that do not fall into tracks (a) through (d) that are commonly referred to as complex and that need special or intense management by the court. (See reverse side of this form for a detailed explanation of special management cases.) () (f) Standard Management - Cases that do not fall into any one of the other tracks. (X) 6/18/2024 Plaintiff Attorney for Attorney-at-law Date akarpf@karpf-law.com (215) 639-4970 (215) 639-0801

FAX Number

E-Mail Address

(Clv. 660) 10/02

Telephone

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DESIGNATION FORM

(to be used by counsel or pro se plaintiff to indicate the category of the case for the purpose of assignment to the appropriate calendar)

Address of Plaintiff: 36 Cloister Road, Levittown, PA 19057								
Address of Plaintiff:								
Place of Accident, Incident or Transaction: Defendant's place of business								
,								
RELATED CASE, IF ANY:								
Case Number: Judge: Date Terminated:								
Civil cases are deemed related when Yes is answered to any of the following questions:								
1. Is this case related to property included in an earlier numbered suit pending or within one year Yes No X previously terminated action in this court?								
2. Does this case involve the same issue of fact or grow out of the same transaction as a prior suit yes No X pending or within one year previously terminated action in this court?								
3. Does this case involve the validity or infringement of a patent already in suit or any earlier numbered case pending or within one year previously terminated action of this court?								
4. Is this case a second or successive habeas corpus, social security appeal, or pro se civil rights Yes No X								
certify that, to my knowledge, the within case is / is not related to any case now pending or within one year previously terminated action in this court except as noted above.	1							
DATE:6/18/2024ARK2484 / 91538								
Attorney-at-Law / Pro Se Plaintiff Attorney I.D. # (if applicable)								
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JS 44 (Rev. 04/21)

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The JS 44 civil cover sheet and the information contained herein neither replace nor supplement the filing and service of pleadings or other papers as required by law, except as provided by local rules of court. This form, approved by the Judicial Conference of the United States in September 1974, is required for the use of the Clerk of Court for the purpose of initiating the civil docket sheet. (SEE INSTRUCTIONS ON NEXT PAGE OF THIS FORM.)

I. (a) PLAINTIFFS				DEFENDANTS							
BROFMAN, JANELLE				UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA HEALTH SYSTEM D/B/A THE TRUSTEES OF THE UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA							
(b) County of Residence of First Listed Plaintiff Bucks				County of Residence of First Listed Defendant Philadelphia							
(EXCEPT IN U.S. PLAINTIFF CASES)				(IN U.S. PLAINTIFF CASES ONLY) NOTE: IN LAND CONDEMNATION CASES, USE THE LOCATION OF THE TRACT OF LAND INVOLVED.							
(c) Attorneys (Firm Name, Address, and Telephone Number)				Attorneys (If Known)							
Ari R. Karpf, Esq.; Karpf, Karp Feasterville-Trevose, PA 19053											
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VII. REQUESTED IN COMPLAINT: CHECK IF THIS IS A CLASS ACTION UNDER RULE 23, F.R.Cv.P.			N D	EMAND \$			HECK YES only J RY DEMAND :		n complai	int:	
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